Nova Scotia Centre
for Craft *and* Design

Mary E Black
Gallery

1683 Barrington Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia

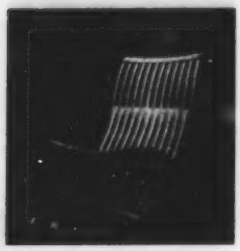
Things We Use

October 4 – November 10, 2001

Curated by Peter G. Zimmer

NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism and Culture

Introduction



Steamer 1 collection lounge chair prototype
©1977 Tom Lamb Archive

"Things We Use" is the kind of phrase which both simplifies and complicates: it simplifies because it uses shorter words than the alternative (= "Functional Objects in our Society") and complicates because it is pure description stripped of a built-in interpretive dimension, although in being so it opens up a fascinating opportunity to understand what is familiar all over again.

It is the right title for the show.

The curator, Peter Zimmer, is a designer who has been based in Nova Scotia since the 1970s. Through his exhibition, The Mary E. Black Gallery *offers a unique opportunity in Nova Scotia to explore the rationale of design.*

— Chris Tyler, Manager,
Nova Scotia Centre for Craft and Design

David Pye opens **The Nature of Design** with

> *This book is not about aesthetics but about design and making, two of the principal human activities, and ones informed by both art and science. If anyone thinks it is important to civilization that a common ground between art and science shall be found, then he had better look for it in front of his nose; for ten to one that he will see there something which has been designed.*
>
> *The art of design, which chooses that the things we use shall look as they do, has a very much wider and more sustained impact than any other art ... The man-made world, our environment, is a work of art, all of it, every bit of it. But not all good.*

"Design" and "Things We Use"

Considering product design of everyday objects

Madrax Genesis
Madrax® a division of Trilory, Inc.

In one broad sense of the word "design" (one increasingly used in the popular press and public discourse) everything man-made has been "designed": it has been given a specific shape, materials have been selected, details planned (or accepted because that's the way the part comes from the handiest supplier). But in this "design" means no more than that someone has more or less paid some attention to the look and feel and function of the thing. Accepting this broadest of meanings empties the term of useful meaning, and reduces it to a buzz-word. "Design is good, design is important, if I like it it is well-designed, I'll be a designer ..."

In the sense that I want to explore with you in this exhibit, "design" is a disciplined intentional process in the service of production and marketing of many instances of a real three-dimensional objects. Product design is carried out by people, individuals who see themselves as working seriously as designers and design managers. This is not rocket science, nor is it pure engineering, not styling or decorating: it is an intellectual and externally constrained way of working, a process of exploration and development that can be done in many ways and to many quality standards.

> *Commonly when we as consumers and users see a product on a store's shelf or in a friend's hands we react to that as a finished thing and judge it forthwith. The designers' eye, the manufacturer's eye may see it as an experiment, a work in progress, and idea that still deserves a tweak or two or three or four more. It may suggest related objects, line extensions, add-on or accessories ... If they, and we, are fortunate they will get they chance to present the improvements to us.*

If you are at all like me, you find that in day-to-day life we often find ourselves using objects, tools that we recognize as losers, poorly made or poorly thought out. Sometimes we find ourselves buying or using something that seems to be quite like another item of its sort, one that we've been told *is* high quality, well-designed, but we can't afford the price. And sometimes the substitution is quite all right.

So I've included things we've just settled for rather than thoughtfully selected. Included are some things that attracted our eyes, or appealed first to our desire for the lowest price.

I am using the selections of objects to explore with you some of the ways designers of the the things we use think and have thought about the whole process of bringing a notion forward into the world as a dozen or a thousand or a few hundred thousand very similar things. We'll look at some of the forces that constrain their imaginations, and the reasons for success and failure in the market places where the products have been launched.

Product Design is an applied art in the service of commerce: it does not exist as pure research or artistic exploration.

In this show of designed objects you will find

- A hunting knife developed in the late 1950s from an individual's unique design concept matched with a manufacturer with the right skills and willingness to invest, a knife which won international design recognition and became the engine that still powers a small traditional skilled craft-based manufacturing business through a half-century (and four generations) of international success.
- A chair whose outstanding design, commissioned by a Nova Scotian manufacturer, quickly achieved international design recognition but failed to fit the business needs and capacities of the company and never was brought to market with that company; a few years later a commercial launch of the chair happened, but the new licenser's business failed and the chair disappeared from the market; some years later a third manufacturer, halfway

round the world, licensed the design and brought it successfully to a global marketplace and the chairs now enter the design's home country as an import.

- Two tool systems for carving are developed in sequence by a group of privately owned user-aware, design-driven companies that listened to and observed and thought about its user-customers' needs. An idea for a replacable-blade wood-carving knife system flowed from an understanding that many woodcarvers are not good about sharpening their carving tools, and from consideration of standard surgical scalpels which provided both a conceptual model and a ready and economic source of suitable blades. The group's design-and-manufacturing company spent about a year in developing this product, going through fifteen prototypes to get the tool's handpiece design and the manufacturing process right. It was added to the Veritas product line and the Lee Valley tools catalogs in 1996. Where a customer, both a woodworker and surgeon, found it and started to use this woodcarving tool as a much preferable handpiece for his surgeon's scalpel. And in considering the redesign of this tool to really suit this new use, the group's founder saw a new business opportunity and spun off a whole new company to design innovative hand tools for the medical professions based on expertise developed in design of woodworkers' tools. After three years in development the Canica Scalpel was launched in Summer 2001.

Design of new products is a process that is properly creative, multi-faceted, researched, iterative, collaborative and risky.

- **creative** – A new design relies ultimately on individual designers having a creative insight in response to a challenge and calls on their drive to do it better, differently, less expensively, more elegantly (or brutally) A new product design is often but not exclusively based on patentable invention or copyright-able intellectual properties (and sometimes the design process spits out these intellectual properties as a side effect of responding to the needs of the design brief.)
- **multi-faceted** – calling on aesthetics, semantics, semiotics, even ethnological, anthropological and psychological insights in addition to technically and economically specifiable criteria for success.
- **researched** – Materials, tools, manufacturing processes and capabilities, marketing opportunities, users' needs and responses, financial returns and opportunities are all considered, and sometimes transform the design beyond recognition from the original concept.
- **iterative** – Typically there are generations of prototypes and preliminary designs on the bench, on paper or computer screen, often followed by revisions of the production models first launched before the design is correct and final. [Folk wisdom – products go through five model revisions before the product is "right", and many products are pulled from the market before the design has been fully tweaked and the promise of concept really tested in end-users hands.]
- **risky** – A new design requires an investment, sometimes substantial, to bring forth something that did not previously exist in the marketplace. Design management tries to handle these risks by rationalizing the investments at each stage. Many "good" or even superior award winning, museum-exhibited designs never see the light of commercial day, or make only a minor and brief appearance in commerce for perfectly good business reasons (or what are thought to be good reasons by the people who pay for the design and development). Luck — in timing, in external trends and competitors' actions, in location, in making partnerships, in finding the right material or contract component manufacturer or skilled technologist or designers — matters more than the rationalist would like.
- **collaborative** – the product designer is a part of a group effort, requiring communications and cooperation with researchers, management, engineering, production, packaging.

Qualities Matter.

Why pick one rock to hold your papers from blowing off your desk, rather than another? Or put one chair in a museum and another into thousands of classrooms, offices, veterinarians' waiting rooms across the continent? Humans' senses easily make remarkably fine distinctions of shape, colour, texture, smell ... The devil (and heaven) is in the details, and in how the details work together, over time, in slightly different situations. We can feel a good fit, recognize a well-finished surface.

Designers propose, Manufacturers dispose

Professional product designers and "folk designers" alike create the look and feel of the parts of objects that we notice with our senses as we first see the product and as we use the product ... colour, texture (seen and felt), size, proportions, weight, shape, smell even ... and in

controlling these qualities they tap their knowledge and intuitions about meanings the buyers and the end users may attach to the product.

During the design process the professional designers may be assessing the unique qualities of the materials and the tools that shape the materials — they may in fact push a plastics manufacturer to create a new variant with a certain look or feel, they may (re)design production machinery, tooling and work procedures to realize the details of the design. Or they may accept the production tools and materials as a given, and find new product concepts or new market opportunities.

The designers can bring to the process information and insight about the whole range of human responses to the design by the intended users:

There are in today's business world design superstars — Karim Rashid (Egypt, Canada, New York, and the world) is one — and designers of historic note and influence — Denmark's Hans Wegener, James Krenov, the Eames brothers ...

And there is that most ubiquitous of all designers, "Anonymous Unknown", who has shaped the vast majority of the objects we all use at home and work. "A.U." sometimes is an single unknown genius and sometimes is part of a large creative team. A.U. is seldom if ever named, save on his paycheck. A.U. is also behind most of the "me too" designs that follow the successful innovations as surely as fleas follow cats.

Things We Use

This exhibit won't present the designed object in solitary glory, as an museum piece separated from its real-world context. We'll look at the process that brings objects into the market place and determines their successes and failures there. We'll look at some of the contexts surrounding the objects.

- We'll see how they are used by their intended users (and unintended users), and how these users were part of the design process (or weren't), and how users can determine the long-term success of a product, of a design approach.
- We'll note how the designed objects fit into the business objectives of the organizations that make them and those that sell them and and the organizations and individuals that buy them.
- We'll consider some processes of making the objects control the design of the product, and how the choices of tools influence the look and function and marketability of the to final objects, and how the tools can shape the designer's imagination.
- We'll show how meanings can be embodied in the objects: the messages they send on the shop floor; on the vendors' shelves or in their catalogs; and in the end users' hands.
- And we'll look in a bit at the designers' minds ... We'll ask "who are these people and why do they think with objects the way that they do?". We'll seek to tease out a bit of why some designers are "professional" designers, and others with good designs to their credit are not. We'll speak about the designer/client relationships, and we'll touch on the designer as businessman, and the "designer" as one role in a life of many roles assumed sometimes in sequence and sometimes in parallel.

Weaving the design of product design

The show's 60-some everyday things fall under four headings — knives, chairs, vessels, bike racks, four "warp threads" of functional similarity.

This warp is crossed, joined, woven loosely together by the story lines (some short, some longer) of product design context and aspect. Included in the woof are threads we can consider are:

- **design by users & user-centered design** – where the end-users' needs and wants feed into the design process
- **designers' personal intentions and ambitions** – a very human desire for fame, fortune, intellectual and artistic satisfaction, professional recognitions, and all that
- **tools, materials and process** – the possibilities of manufacturability shape product designs; where individual skills and workmanship and available tools of production and exploitable technologies inspire and limit possibilities
- **design briefs** – the written statements of [all] the client's requirements as understood by the design managers
- **external business imperatives** – the client's global situation: not part of the stated design brief, but a meta-brief (often unknown or unknowable by any of the design team)

- **vendors' objectives** – what's wanted by the marketing and sales chain — distributors, wholesalers and retailers all may (or should) have influence before the product roles off the production line.
- **history of objects and history of design** – people's experience builds their expectations and willingness to explore new design possibilities

This show and essay's intellectual fabric is not intended as a tightly woven argument but rather a loose and open web that will invite the viewer to sense how professional designers work and how they deal with the forces around them.

The objects in the threads — Knives – Chairs – Vessels – Bike Racks

Knives :

1. **Engraved bench-made folding hunting knives by Don Bell.**
2. **Russell #R1S Knives by Grohmann** original designed and developed by Deane H. Russell and knife-maker Rudolph Grohmann in the late 1950's. Grohmann Knives Ltd. in Pictou NS continues to make the #R1S and other types and models of hunting knives based on the R1S and a full line of quality chef's knives.
3. **Large Pelting Knife**
4. **#3 Boat Knife**
5. **10" Forged Chef's Knife**
6. **Folding Knife – Rudolph Grohmann**
7. **TrailBlazer's Xtend-A-Blade** folding knife/saw, with built in socket for extension pole.
8. Surgical Scalpel Bard-Parker-type (1915) – disposable and easy to sharpen blades, an early standard tool still in use.
9. **Veritas Carver's Knife** with blade storage – US Design Patent 418,733.
10. **Canica Standard Ejectable Blade Scalpel** – Pat. applied for.

Veritas Carvers knife
Lee Valley Tools Ltd.

Pieces of chipped rock, with a sharp edge and a dull edge (to hold onto) were the first knives, and one of the first tools "designed" by human hand and mind. Refinements followed over the tens of millennia as various people paid attention to the possibilities of different kinds of minerals, different tools to chip edges and ways to hold the sharp edge without cutting the holding hand.

Twenty thousand years or so later specialized knives are still being invented and designed and made and sold and bought in a bewildering variety of purposes, shapes, materials and qualities.

We have included knives at a dollar or two [7a, 7i] (and these are even "guaranteed for five years", though for what is not clear), and uniquely decorated knives valued well above one thousand dollars. Some are general purpose tools to be carried in a pocket or sheath for "just in case"... And some are highly specialized tools — scalpels for a hand surgeon and vegetable peelers. Some carry a minimum of meanings — modest, unassuming, just enough to do the job — and others invite laughter and affection, pride of ownership. For some knives the designers considered the users' needs carefully, and with others the manufacturers copied outward form, the visual design, but left considerations of utility and users needs entirely aside. All by design.

Vegetable peelers: everyone in the kitchen accessories business sells these gadgets, everyone uses them.

1. **dollar-store swivel peeler A** – the bare minimum, $1
2. **dollar-store swivel peeler A** – the bare minimum, $1
3. **Roscan swivel blade**, a near-classic all-steel form, yet with a Design Patent #87770, Cat: #639, $4
4. **Good Grips Swivel Peeler"Oxo"** ergonomic award winning design [USA] — the start of the good grips product line. $6
5. **Cushion grip D-peeler,** Roscan, $4
6. **Cushion grip D-peeler**
7. **Koziol bio-form swivel peelers "Eddy"** (complete with bellybutton) by Orange Design: Darmstadt [Germany]
8. **Koziol bio-form transverse peeler "Knut"** by Orange Design: Darmstadt [Germany]
9. **Trudeau Peeler** #099-1676 UPC# 65255 03202 Soft Handle ergonomic [Canadian Company: designer?] $7
10. **Swivel Peeler (RH) Zwilling J.A. Henckels** #12043-000, the only one with a replaceable blade, available left-handed and right-handed. $15
11. **Fixed blade "Spud Peeler"** – fixed blade basic 2-way blade, with a three-Spuds molded handle UPC# 67742 50475, $5

12. **Fixed blade peeler** - all-stainless, with blade sheath. $3.50
13. **Fixed blade peeler** from a dollar-store.

Take it off, take it all off ... nicely

Thirteen cutting cousins — variations on the humble vegetable peeler — showing the diversity of a knife-based commercial ecologic niche.

Cutco Peeler
Cutco Cutlery Corporation

From a 10¢ yard-sale bargain to a modest $15 or so, the peeler is an ubiquitous kitchen gadget for the home and cottage (most households have at least a couple), they are a must-have on the rack for the retailer (kitchen gadgets are wonderful for impulse sales), and and a necessary part of the product line for household gadget makers and most kitchen knife manufacturers.

With the technical essentials set a century or more ago, subtleties of visual and tactile and functional design distinguish one from another, with no overwhelming commercial winners... but in the ***Things We Use*** collection there are functional and esthetic winners. And a couple real losers — non peelers that at first glance look like they would work.

In the collection are design award winners, arthritis friendly handles, friendly and fun handles, sharp blades and dull, strong and weak materials, original designs and their clones. Some are the product of identifiable designers, and some have the designs protected by Design patents or design copyrights.

Chairs – curving materials to our bodies' needs

C1 **Windsor 19th C chair** - NS Museum collection

C1a **Windsor chair parts**

C2 **Steam-bent school chair** - Dominion Chair Co. [example borrowed Dal Architecture]

C2a **Contemporary factory-made Windsor chair**

C3 **Windsor chair(s) 21st C** - Melanson Mountain Chairworks

C4 **The Steamer Chair** - Thomas Lamb, Designer

C5 **The Steamer Side chair**

C6 **A proto-Clam chair**

C8 **The CLAM• chair** - Diethelm von Lieres and Peter Zimmer Designers

C9 **Stacking plastic** - VenRez manufacturer, Designer?

The interplay of design intentions, tools, materials, business organization, and the social context in filling a simple human need — somewhere comfortable to sit.

The chair is the furniture that most directly interacts with the human's body when awake. The chair makers and chair designers who want to offer users some un-upholstered sitting comfort need to account for the varying shapes and contours of the human posterior, lower back and upper legs.

The Windsor chairs in ***Things We Use*** embody an approach to making such a seat, an approach that has been evolving and undergoing refinements for more than two hundred years.

Much of the machinery of woodworking has evolved to cut round (more or less) tree trunks into pieces of nearly perfectly rectangular, straight and flat stock of modular sizes (2 x 4s, 1x 10s, 4'x 8' x 3/4" sheets of plywood ...) which in turn is cut and joined to make (mostly) rectangular buildings and rooms and (mostly) rectangular cupboards, tables, even chairs. And where rooms and furniture are not rectangular, the furniture for the most part is composed of assemblies of flat planes and simple geometric shapes — trapezoids, triangles, cylinders.

There are several sorts of wood objects where necessity and ingenuity have led, even forced, makers and designers away from the world of flat surfaces and angles. The handles of tools, the shape of boats, and the shapes of un-upholstered yet comfortable seating all reflect the design requirements of the prolonged and intimate contact with the givens of nature — the shape of a human hand and its need to hold, move, finely control a tool; the fluid dynamics of oceans and the air above; and the bones and muscles and fat of the human butt.

The Windsor chairs embody a well-proved design and system of construction that still has space to support innovation and individuality in the work of designer-craftsmen chair makers [3], as well as to supply design variations that resulted thousands of modestly priced chairs from a Parrsboro factory serving regional and export markets using local materials and not terribly complex machinery for more than a hundred years [2]. The core technologies of all these chairs was more akin to building wagon wheels than it was to cabinetmaking: different species of wood were used for different parts, selected for their functional strengths; spoke-shaped parts with round tenons secured in angled drilled holes to forms the legs and stretchers and much of the back; (steam-) bent wood elements for

the top rail and the arms; and nary a right angle to be seen. In the Windsor chair the legs and back are joined together through a carved-to-fit slab of wooden seat. Historically, paint or dark stains minimized visual differences of the several types of wood used in each chair.

For more than two centuries chair makers, large-scale and small, building for a sophisticated buyers [1a] or rough country bodgers [1b] assembling chairs for neighbors' use, have drawn on the "Windsor" chair "concept" for inspiration and a reliable cash generator. Windsor chairs are still in production, in many factories and in the shops of individual craftsmen. You can find a new Windsor side chair for $50 at Zellers (on sale) [2] and you can buy a designer-craftsman-made version for twenty times that [4].

These designs still offer (in their better incarnations) some of the most comfortable sitting available in an non-upholstered chair. The design and making allow easy changes to proportions. And easy refinement of the design as the an individual chair maker made successive orders.

By the 1970s the market for the Windsor chair products of Dominion Chair Company (the makers of the Bass River Chairs) was decreasing: changes of taste, competition in the institutional market by chairs of metal and plastic, changes in the costs of transportation and the efficiency of competitors elsewhere. One possible response for a company to such a challenge would be to introduce new products and/or find new markets for their products (which might well mean modifying their products for the new markets).

Steamer 1 collection dining chair prototype
©1977 Tom Lamb Archive

The Steamer chair design [4, 5] was a direct result of an attempt to do just this: in 1976 a young recent graduate of Ryerson, Tom Lamb, with support from Design Canada, was asked to study the capabilities of the Dominion factory and to design a chair for them that would open a new market for them, that would be distinctive, and theirs alone. The outcome of Lamb's six-month residency at Bass River was the Steamer chair — a name that played on both the heritage of the type of folding lounge chairs that were used on the classic ocean passenger steamers of the first half of the 20th century and on the process Dominion would use to form the slats — steam-bending.

As an aesthetic and technical design the chair was and is very good (it was included in New York's Museum of Modern Art Design Study Collection). It was never brought to market by Nova Scotia's Dominion Chair Company. As a commercial savior for the company the Steamer chair has to be considered a failure: even though it was designed for use of the company's existing technology. It did not fit the rest of the company's business — it was too different from every existing product and would have had to be marketed in a whole new way through different retailers and wholesalers. It was, by design, a high-end sort of chair, that would sell for a premium price, which in turn requires careful attention to details of materials and manufacture and finishing — the sort of details that were not critical to the marketability of their other chairs, where a quick coat of "old oak" semi-opaque lacquer stain and a low-end price could cover a variety of production blemishes. The Steamer Chair design could accept no such cover up.

And it is today an ongoing modest commercial success, in production, sold world-wide, but manufactured under license by an Indonesian company.

Elsewhere in Nova Scotia in the 1970s a curiosity-driven experiment in chair design was making its way towards a serious product design effort and a commercial launch [C6]. It was based on images of a student-designed prototype of a "high-efficiency relaxing chair for dancers" published in 1971.

CLAM® chair
Diethelm von Lieres and Peter Zimmer Designers
Photo: George Thomas

Like the Steamer and unlike the Windsor chairs this chair accommodated the human curves only in the head-to-toe direction, but did this intentionally and very well, fitting comfortably people as short as 4' 10" and as tall as 6' 5" (~150–200 cm). This was a legs-up lounging chair taking the user way beyond the Laz-Y-Boy's feet-almost-level-with-the-head posture: with no mechanical links, the user could rock back to a back-horizontal, legs up-at 45° position, and easily rock back to a lounge-sitting position. This legs-up posture is exceedingly restful and restorative for over-used legs and feet — this fir-plywood version was hinged to allow the six-foot long one-person chair to be folded up and stood out of the way, a necessity in the inventor's small apartment.

A few copies were sold, made up as needed, but it was far too "home-made" looking to be seriously marketed through any commercial distribution or retail channels. But there was some outside interest in marketing an improved version of this chair. In 1979–80 the chair, now dubbed the Clam chair (for it's prototype's folded-up profile) was

taken back to the drawing boards and to extensive in-shop prototyping by Peter Zimmer and Diethelm von Lieres. Everything but the longitudinal geometry (rockers' curves and back/leg support and the function of the hinge mechanism) was changed — visually, mechanically, in materials and detail. The new hinge mechanism was patented, the chairs look was protected with industrial design patents or design copyrights in five countries and the trade mark registered in Canada and the USA. The product was designed to ship unhinged and compactly boxed (it could at the time be mailed to BC from Cape Breton for $11). It achieved national media attention and rave reviews from its users (about half the purchasers allowed their interest was primarily for their back problems) and was included in a juried travelling crafts show. Production started in late 1979, and ended in the midst of the 1980 recession, with one hundred-some $400–$700 Clam Chairs sold throughout Canada, in the US and Germany.

In 2000 a CLAM® chair was donated to the Canadian Museum of Civilization and added to their Canadian Furniture collection.

The VenRez molded fibre-glass stacking chairs are in many ways the successors to the institutional-use Windsor chairs, offering economy and a body conforming seat shape. Where the Windsor chair would make use of maple or birch for legs and stretchers, pine (for seats) and ash (for the steam-bent parts), these chairs combine plastic resins seat and back unit with a metal legs structure.

Vessels:

V1 **a rock and a hole: vase**

V2 **a rock and a hole: candle stick**

V3 **a rock and a hole: planter**
Stoneworks Stonesmiths – original materials by the North Atlantic and the waves of Nova Scotia: selections, drilling, finishing by Daren Arsenault and Marie Jardin.

V4 **raku vase**

V5 **raku vase**

V6 **raku vase**
Nick March Spirit of the Wheel Pottery: a designed shape

V7 **Wine glasses** designer's blown glass

V8 **"peasant" wine glasses**

V9 **Nova Scotia Crystal**

V10 **beer cans, pop bottles ...**

V11 **plastic glasses** – a lower functional denominator

Nick Marsh Dawns Nicholas Marsh, Spirit of the Wheel Pottery

From the technical minimum of working found materials with a standard simple tool through to manufacture of a aluminum beer can — all objects here to hold liquids, and are designed substitutes for our cupped hands or a hollow in a rock or a goat's stomach.

For the first items, we are first and foremost in the realm of meanings socially ascribed to objects — aesthetics, semiotics, semantics ... every one goes beyond the need to hold water for having a drink or to hold a few cut flowers on the table for our pleasure. The 25¢ plastic tumbler [V11] from the supermarket does that (and on some functional measures does it much better).

What is offered in the different designs are different levels of care and selection by the makers and designers, rarity of materials and rarity of the skills to work those materials at some edge near failure, attention to minute difference in shapes that somehow appeal to eye and hand and even to ear and nose — differences that are not always immediately evident, differences that may be totally social when the designer or the manufacturer is a current hot "brand". One may want the "better" or the "best" simply to demonstrate that one can afford it and, inferentially, appreciate it.

And at other times, in other circumstances, one may choose the rougher, the peasant-like, the recycled glass wine glasses — not because the glass hold more wine, or holds it better, or improves its flavour — but because the look of the glasses sends a message, to oneself and to others, of an affinity ("I'm a recycler", "I'm quirky", "I'm a non-snob") or invitation ("Ask me, PLEASE ask me about this weird set of drinking glasses").

At one time in the history of metalworking, the ability to shape any metal to a thin and even thickness in a regularly shaped shell required the greatest of skill of a master metalsmith with the highest qualities of materials: today, a soda comes in a throw-away cylinder of aluminum, a pop-can, that could not have been equalled by Bellini or any of the Renaissance goldsmiths, or even by the manufacturers and engineers of forty years ago. Yet today these marvels of metalworking, mass produced by the billions, are only the lightest possible containers holding a quantity of fizzy flavoured sugar-water and providing surfaces for labels and logos.

Bike Racks:

B1 **Photos** lock a bike to a parking meter, a lamp post, a railing ... wherever you can find a place that your lock will fit.

B2 **Photos "welder's specials":** folk-designs but not well-designed — most often a cartoon of a useful product produced for minimum cost, laid out by non-bicyclists with no research. Most often added to a project or a building (Sobey's stores, Canadian Tire) as an after-thought rather than as a well-considered solution to the needs of bicyclers/customers.

B3 **The Ribbon** - beloved of architects, actually the first N. American "designed as public furniture",

B4 **The post and ring**

B5 **Corus "Expo"**

B6 **Madrax**

Cora Expo SS
Cora Bike Racks

Bike racks are public furniture. They are, like benches and bus shelters, placed on our streets and in front of our buildings to serve some fraction of our public. But even for the non-cycling public the racks occupy and shape and condition our public space, implicitly implying support of or contempt for the users.

We observe that many cyclists, offered a "proper" and authorized bike rack (that is, one selected by an architect or other agent of the owner of the property) choose not to use what is on offer [B1] For what has been offered by the manufacturer and bought by some purchasing agency and installed as spedified by the manufacturer is not in fact designed to accomodate the geometry of the actual bicycles and the actual locks in use.

They are judged by the users on how well they work (and many don't work at all well) and how conveniently they are located to the cyclists' destinations (much as car drivers rate parking spaces).

Bike users would assert that decent places to lock up their bikes are a necessary part of any public transportation model that includes bicycles. Automobile parking spaces on the streets and in off-street parking facilities in public and private buildings are mandated in bylaws and building codes.

The traffic authorities, the architects and building mangers will for the most part consider bicycle parking a trivial item (how many of them have ridden a bike to their work?) and not attend to the qualities of the solutions, with a tenth the concern they apply to the laying out of the lines of paint designating car parking slots. Yet the individual riding a bike may be a customer with as much disposable income as any SUV driver (or more, not having to pay for SUV and gas), may be a lawyer working in the building, or a rent-paying tenant.

Note on Canadian Content and what objects I picked to include:

I started close to home — with objects and people and designs and stories that I was familiar with, with objects I have owned, or used, or lusted after or (most of all) found stimulating to think about as I figured out what this show was to be — things that bring satisfaction (or sometimes frustration) everyday as we take them in hand or use them.

It turns out that most of the items have a Nova Scotian connection, or a Canadian designer or a Canadian manufacturer — and many of the objects still in production reach out, because of their design qualities from here to continental and world markets.

Reference points:

- my own love of discovering new tools and materials and how they work in the world
- Donald A. Norman's **The Psychology of Everyday Things**
- David Pye's books **The Nature of Design** Van Nostrand Reinhold, NY 1964. paperbound 96 pp. [out of print] and **The Nature and Art of Workmanship** (1968)
- Friends and acquaintances, the inventors, designers, craftsmen and artists, professionals academics and amateurs who've concerned themselves with making things never see before and with thinking about the issues making stuff who I've had many interesting, provoking and informing conversations over the years.

— *Peter G. Zimmer*